Basic Care: Oxygen Use at Home

What is happening

Home oxygen is commonly used in hospice care to help improve comfort and reduce shortness of breath. Oxygen from a tank or concentrator is highly concentrated; oxygen tanks also store gas under pressure. Follow the hospice team's instructions for safe use.

Important safety information

Oxygen increases fire risk. Oxygen itself is **not flammable** and does not burn, but it makes other materials ignite more easily and burn faster.

Smoking safety

- Never smoke or allow smoking, vaping, or open flames near oxygen equipment or where oxygen is being used.

Keep oxygen away from heat and flames

- Keep oxygen equipment and tubing at least **10 feet away** from heaters, stoves, candles, fireplaces, and other open flames or heat sources.

Avoid flammable products nearby

- Do not use aerosol sprays, alcohol-based products, petroleum-based lotions or ointments (including products such as Vicks), or oil/grease near oxygen equipment unless approved by the hospice team.

Electrical safety

- Keep oxygen away from sparks and electrical hazards. Do not place oxygen tubing or oxygen outlets next to electrical outlets, switches, or devices that may spark.
- Plug an oxygen concentrator directly into a properly grounded wall outlet, following the equipment supplier's instructions. Do not use extension cords or power strips.

Safe storage and setup

- Secure oxygen cylinders upright in an approved stand or holder so they cannot fall.
- Keep concentrator vents clear. Do not cover equipment with blankets or clothing or place it in an enclosed space such as under a bed.
- Keep a working smoke alarm and a suitable fire extinguisher available, and know how to get help in a fire.

Using oxygen safely

The hospice team will provide the prescribed equipment, tubing, and supplies and explain how to turn the equipment on and off and which oxygen flow rate to use.

Do not change the oxygen flow rate unless instructed by the hospice team.

Caring for tubing and comfort

- Check tubing for damage, cracks, disconnections, or kinks. Ask the hospice team for replacement supplies when needed.
- Oxygen may cause dryness in the nose or mouth. Ask the hospice team whether humidification or a water-based moisture product is appropriate.

When to call hospice

- Oxygen equipment is not working properly, or tubing is damaged or disconnected.
- Shortness of breath is worsening, or the patient appears uncomfortable despite oxygen use.
- You are unsure how to operate the equipment safely.

In a fire: Get everyone to safety and call 911. Do not attempt to move or shut off equipment if doing so puts you at risk.

Caregiver education only. Follow your hospice team's instructions and the oxygen supplier's equipment-specific safety guidance.